

C.A.U.S.E.: Nurturing the Inner Social Activist in Middle School Students

Inspiration for CAUSE

"Can educators imagine a role for schools that will influence the leaders of the new century in ways that will help them acquire values that produce social capital as well as material consumption and economic gain? Can a vision about the role of education include creating future political leaders who place fairness and kindness and social justice ahead of power, control, and pandering to special interests? ... Could some of the endless pitches for commercial products at least be interspersed with advocacy for more time with our children, a greater tolerance for diversity, and more concern for the rapid depletion of the Earth's resources? It is intriguing to think that the men and women who will decide the content of such messages are the boys and girls who are in our classrooms today." ~Joseph Renzulli

What is CAUSE ?

C--Courage

A--Activism

U--Understanding

S--Solution

E--Effect

Operation Houndstooth: Inspired by the positive psychology movement, Renzulli, Koehler and Fogarty (2006) created this model for guiding gifted students toward maximizing their gifts and passions for the benefit of themselves and society. The approach begins with external rewards and recognitions, gradually moving toward the creation of social capital through developmentally appropriate steps including vicarious and group-supported experiences.

Two Models Used with Teaching CAUSE

P--Problem/Project

B--Based

L--Learning

S--Science

T--Technology

R--Reading/wRiting

E--Engineering

A--Arts

M--Math

The Three Part (Three Year) Plan for CAUSE

Part I: (Grade 6)	Sixth graders begin by learning about and reflecting on themselves through the creation of a "Total Talent Portfolio," which will follow them through all three grades. One inclusion in the portfolio asks students to identify causes or problems which concern them or affect them personally. We begin CAUSE with "Courage": students explore different types of courage in literary characters and segue into "Activism," where they are introduced to real-life examples of activists who combine different types of courage, creativity, and personal strengths to inspire positive
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	change. Group experiences, including TEd videos, <i>Racing Extinction</i> , and the adult version of <i>I Am Malala</i> , lead to two culminating activities: a “legacy” poem and development of a research-based Glog on a cause that intrigues each student.
Part II: (Grade 7)	Now that students have gained an understanding of their own unique talents, strengths, and interests in sixth grade, seventh graders continue with CAUSE and focus on “U” or understanding and “S” or solutions. Understanding begins with a unit on human rights. We examine the Universal Declaration of Human Rights followed by a Socratic seminar and discussion. A creative problem solving method is utilized to brainstorm a list of human rights’ issues and problems in our own neighborhoods and communities as well as possible solutions. Students then narrow down the list to topics they really care about, research solutions to these problems, and finally, research an important social activist related to this area. The unit culminates with a research project where students “become” a social activist by presenting a first-person monologue for a social activist wax museum.
Part III: (Grade 8)	<p>The final step of CAUSE, which is “E”, requires students to be a positive effect in regard to supporting a cause. Students begin the unit by choosing, gathering information, planning, coordinating, presenting, and participating in a class “cause”. Students are the stakeholders and therefore become invested in the class project. This step is important for modeling the process of getting involved in a cause. PBL and STREAM serve as the two frameworks for guiding and shaping this part of the project.</p> <p>Once students have become familiar with the process of getting involved in a cause, the next part of the unit is executed. This part of the unit brings together everything students have learned over the three year period of time. Students choose their own CAUSE and are required to produce an effect for the cause. This requires students to gather information, and then use the information to plan, coordinate, present, and participate. Ultimately, this is the goal of CAUSE, and students are encouraged to use what they have learned in middle school for the rest of their lives. By the end of Part III, students should be the advocates who truly provide a way for society to have “more time with our children, a greater tolerance for diversity, and more concern for the rapid depletion of the Earth’s resources” (Joseph Renzulli).</p>

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